

siones racionalistas de posguerra, ilusiones perdidas que, antes de ser tópicos fueron vida, una vida que pocas veces nos ha sido contada en un mismo texto desde la doble perspectiva del interior y del exilio. Creo que, con toda su marginalidad editorial (otro signo de coherencia con la autenticidad del empeño), *Morir en Isla Vista* debería servir de referencia para la definición de una generación «transicional» y «transaccional» que, por lo visto, ya comienza a ser historia.

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Adelaida García Morales. *El secreto de Elisa*. Madrid, Debate, 1999, 266 pp.

*El secreto de Elisa* reads with the same fluid pace as the ease and grace with which its main character, Elisa, leaves her husband and settles into an unnamed town somewhere in the rolling hills of the province of Segovia. Equally as engaging as the countryside for which Elisa yearns in an effort to escape Madrid's numbing effect on her, is the opening line of the novel: «[d]espués de veintiocho años de matrimonio, Elisa empezó a sospechar, por vez primera, que su marido [Gabriel] le ocultaba la existencia de una amante» (5). Once made aware of Elisa's propensity for daydreaming and fantasizing about reality, and her quest for solitude, the reader soon perceives the ethereal quality that is a hallmark of García Morales' writing. In keeping with the resulting calm of such otherworldliness, Elisa's rational acceptance of Aurora, her husband's paramour, diminishes the expected—anecdotal—tension that usually stems from marital infidelity, and advances the smoothness of an unencumbered third-person narration. Because of the absence of traditional markers that ordinarily weave mimetic dialogue into narrative discourse, the narratorial consciousness remains lucidly coherent, while at the same time assuming its proper place in the polyphonic texture of this story about a woman who reshapes her life after her marriage ends.

However exemplary the harmony which characterizes the manner in which her two sons Germán and Pedro—and husband Gabriel—encourage and assure her, it is shattered soon after Elisa takes possession of the two-story house that catches her eye upon driving into the nameless town. Seeing it apparently vacant, Elisa is informed by Eulalia, its owner, of the tragic end that her sister and nephew (Encarna and Daniel) met while living in the house twenty years before. Even though Elisa is advised to stay out of the rooms that are off the kitchen, she is immediately drawn to the locked door that leads to Encarna's and Daniel's rooms. Fearless in the face of Eulalia's misgivings, Elisa delights in adapting the place to her taste and finds great comfort in the warmth of the kitchen. Not unlike her determination to buy the house, she enters

the prohibited area where she discovers those remaining possessions which serve as the coordinates along which she attempts to reconstruct the former inhabitants' lives: photographs of Daniel, the anguished letters that he wrote to his mother from Madrid where he went in search of work in the early 1970s, and Encarna's laceworking equipment (from which she earned a living after abandoning her ill-fated profession as a healer). Despite the terror she experiences the first time she hears the unearthly moaning that emanates from the victims' rooms in the early hours of the morning, Elisa returns night after night. There she learns to deal with the fright she experiences with each encounter, and by reading Daniel's letters about the ruination of his life in Madrid, she becomes enamored of him, and centers her entire existence around an obsessive need to get to know the young man who was himself a practitioner of hypnosis and whose very name is anathema to most of the townspeople.

No sooner does Elisa make a habit of going to Daniel's room in an attempt to commune with him, is the word spread by the local town gossips that she is engaged in unnatural activities and should therefore be shunned. Having been made aware by her neighbor Manuela of the rumors, Elisa covers the window of the room with a heavy black cloth and dismisses such accounts whenever she speaks with her newly-made friends in town: Manuela and her adult daughter, Rosario (one of Daniel's conquests), who is still, according to her account, traumatized because of having witnessed the deaths of both parent and child; the town mayor, Tomás and his wife Teresa; Daniel's only friend, Zacarías, and his wife Irene; Pascual, a friend of Daniel's deceased father; and Ángeles, also one of Daniel's former girlfriends. As Elisa begins to feel more at home in her new surroundings, and particularly given the acceptance that she feels the more time she spends with her new acquaintances (each one of them providing her with their version of how mother and son lived their lives), she becomes wholly captivated by the phenomena that she experiences within the walls of her own house. In keeping, however, with the fantastic as subtext of this novel, she constantly questions the plausibility of her growing intimacy with Daniel: «[n]ecesitaba percibir pruebas más evidentes... pues todavía se dejaba perder... en conjeturas que la conducían a explicaciones en apariencia científica sobre esos sonidos humanos y angustiosos... [p]ero ...[que] resultaban... disparatadas... algo que nunca podría ser aclarado a través de una teoría sensata o de un discurso lógico» (130).

For that purpose, and during one of her habitual trips for provisions to the nearby town, Elisa purchases two of Allan Kardac's books (*El libro de los médiums* and *El libro de los espíritus*) which familiarize her with writing as a means of communicating with Encarna and Daniel, and by which Elisa serves as the medium through which their words appear written in a notebook of blank pages which she keeps at her side for that very purpose when she holds her nightly sessions in their room. It is

from these transcriptions that Elisa confirms her affinity with Encarna and Daniel, being told by both of them that only a woman named Gloria will be able to help them to escape the torment which holds them captive. Elisa scrutinizes in vain maps of the area for the place called Tejuela (where Gloria is to be found) only to realize that it is the name of a street in Madrid, where she does, in fact, locate Gloria, whose curative powers she manages to engage for her cause. As irony would have it, however, freedom for Encarna and Daniel yields unexpected psychological imprisonment for Elisa because Daniel, now liberated from his suffering, tells her that he is always with her, once again reinforcing her never-ending yearning for solitude.

Freedom is nowhere to be found, despite the daring remodeling of the secret rooms that Elisa undertakes after becoming the legal owner of the house. She even takes to writing, and, as if in deference to Carmen Martín Gaité (whose book, *El cuento de nunca acabar*, she has been reading since her move), is unexpectedly set free by means of an occurrence that calls to mind Martín Gaité's novel of the fantastic, *El cuarto de atrás*. Awakening after a night of mental turmoil which she was only able to calm by taking a few tranquilizers, Elisa discovers that Daniel has signed the penned message which appears in one of her notebooks: «[m]e marchó muy lejos... Te quedas sola, pero volveremos a encontrarnos en un mismo espacio» (264). Because the written medium served as the vehicle for Elisa's release from the debilitated state into which she had fallen (and which would eventually have lead to her demise), it makes sense that as the story winds down words occupy more forcefully the narrator's attention, ever mindful that everybody uses them in a variety of ways to suit their purpose.

In considering the numerous narrative voices that talk about Encarna and her son, as well as the other kinds of texts (Daniel's letters, his photograph, Allan Kardac's books, among others) that feed Elisa's own illusions—and eventually her notebooks—the written word as graphic sign is, in reality, all there is to show for Elisa's secret. Hence her decision: «[s]in embargo... supo, finalmente, que lo que ella deseaba escribir era la vida en la que... ya habría comenzado a descubrir después de su prodigiosa despedida» (266). Not unfamiliar to García Morales, as with Elisa, is a postmodern absence which invariably prevails over mimetic presence.

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Luciano G. Egido. *El amor, la inocencia y otros excesos*. Barcelona, Tusquets, 1999. 283 p.

«A lo mejor si Odette le hubiera contado aquel pasado, que tanto le trastornaba a él, se le hubieran evitado muchos disgustos y muchas discusio-